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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 000104

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UP](#)

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: CANDIDATES VIE FOR VOTERS AS THE RUNOFF
CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

REF: KYIV 92

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The two candidates who will compete in the February 7 runoff for the presidency, Party of Regions (Regions) candidate Viktor Yanukovych and PM Yuliya Tymoshenko, kicked-off their campaigns as expected, appealing to the voters who supported second-tier candidates during the first round. Both Yanukovych and Tymoshenko hope to attract the votes of Serhiy Tihipko's supporters, who represent 13% of the first-round vote. Tihipko publicly stated that he will not support either runoff candidate and refused PM Tymoshenko's offer of the prime minister's post should she become president. Yanukovych referred to Tihipko voters as "like-minded people." Front of Change candidate Arseniy Yatsenyuk vowed to become the leader of the opposition to the next government, while President Yushchenko argued it was his moral obligation to remain in politics since both candidates would damage Ukraine's democracy and independence. End summary.

TYMOSHENKO: "FORGIVES ALL"

2. (C) In a January 18 statement, PM Yuliya Tymoshenko told voters that she is ready "to forgive the sharp statements, confrontations and sometimes difficult competition from candidates representing democratic forces." Tymoshenko's campaign rhetoric is trying to draw a stark distinction between her as the candidate of democracy, and opponent Viktor Yanukovych (Regions) as "a criminal" who would weaken Ukraine's democracy and independence. Tymoshenko offered the prime ministership to third-place contender Serhiy Tihipko, who refused. Interestingly, she thereupon pledged that her offer would still stand after she wins the second round on February 7 -- a clear bid to attract Tihipko's voters regardless of Tihipko's personal attitude. In case the message was not already clear, Tymoshenko told Tihipko's voters, who represent 13% of the electorate in the first round, that she is their logical choice since 90% of her platform already corresponds with Tihipko's. Tihipko confirmed Tymoshenko's offer but added that his answer was a definitive no, stating he was not prepared to support either candidate during the second round. In his post-election statement, Tihipko said that he wanted the country to be "shaken up" by subsequent early parliamentary elections, since neither Tymoshenko or Yanukovych would provide the change that is needed. He also told the media that he was considering a run for the Kyiv mayorship. (The Ambassador met with Tihipko January 21; cable to follow septel.)

YANUKOVYCH: TIHIPKO VOTERS "LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE"

3. (U) Not surprisingly, presidential front-runner Viktor

Yanukovych also appealed to Tihipko supporters at a campaign rally in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv on January 21.

He told the crowd that he would not ask any second-tier candidates for a formal endorsement in the runoff election, since it could put them in an "awkward position" with their constituents. He emphasized, however, that he is communicating with these candidates to let them know that there is a place for them in a Yanukovych presidency. Yanukovych said he would appeal directly to the voters themselves and that third-place finisher Serhiy Tihipko's voters were "like-minded people" who would largely vote for him in the second round. Tihipko, in a press conference, confirmed that he had met with Yanukovych following the first-round election, but said it would be inappropriate to divulge the specifics of the discussion.

YATSENYUK: THE "REAL" OPPOSITION

14. (U) During a January 20 interview with Channel 5, Arseniy Yatsenyuk confirmed he had met with Yanukovych and told him that he would not support him in the second round. Yatsenyuk claimed that during this conversation he also warned Yanukovych that he, Yatsenyuk, would lead the future opposition, adding that Yanukovych would come to miss Tymoshenko's opposition once he got a taste of it Yatsenyuk-style. During the interview, Yatsenyuk also said he was going to meet with PM Tymoshenko and would convey the same message to her. He also argued that it would be inappropriate for Tymoshenko to offer him any posts in her government in exchange for his support since "it was her

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campaign that most actively discredited" him as a presidential candidate.

YUSHCHENKO: A POX ON BOTH THEIR HOUSES

15. (U) In a January 20 statement, President Yushchenko stated that it would be "morally wrong" for him to leave politics, adding that "I met my democratic commitments in the position of President of Ukraine." He said that national and state obligations do not give him the moral right to leave politics, and argued that national, European and democratic values are "strange, incomprehensible and very remote" to both candidates in the second round. To him, he said, there is no significant difference between the two.

NEW CEC MEMBER NEEDED; COMMISSION OPEN TO GEORGIAN OBSERVERS

16. (U) On January 19, the Rada voted to remove Anatoliy Pysarenko from the Central Election Commission (CEC) because he had exceeded the mandatory retirement age of 65. His removal was backed by Party of Regions, Lytvyn Bloc, the Communist Party, and the pro-presidential wing of Our Ukraine-People's Self Defense. The Tymoshenko Bloc opposed Pysarenko's removal. President Yushchenko promised prior to the vote on Pysarenko's removal to nominate a replacement that same day, but has so far failed to do so. Rada Speaker Lytvyn threatened to take the issue to the courts if Yushchenko does not announce a nomination before January 22. Lytvyn claimed that Yushchenko was not fulfilling his constitutional duties and that leaving a vacancy in the CEC during an election period was "unconscionable."

17. (U) The Kyiv Administrative Court of Appeals ruled on January 21 that the CEC must reconsider its decision not to register international election observers from Georgia. The court ruled as illegal the CEC's decision to reject all of the observers' applications because some forms were missing information or filled out incorrectly. CEC member Mykhailo Okhondovskiy announced that the CEC was willing to consider registering the Georgian observers, but that Georgia needed

to submit a new registration request.

POSTSCRIPT: TATARS FOR TIHIPKO AND TYMOSHENKO

18. (C) The Turkish ambassador told a gathering of NATO ambassadors January 21 that the Turkish Embassy's monitoring and discussions in the Crimea during election weekend revealed that the Tatars had voted "overwhelmingly" in the first round for Tihipko. He added that the Tatars intend to support Tymoshenko in the second round.

COMMENT

19. (C) Tymoshenko and Yanukovych have taken predictable paths as they galvanize their campaigns for the February 7 vote. Tymoshenko will spare no effort to impress on traditional "orange" voters that a vote for her, even after the disappointment of the Orange Revolution, is still better than staying at home and handing the presidency to Yanukovych. The pressure is on, and the mud is starting to fly. We'll see a lot of it before February 7.
TEFFT